



HADRIAN'S WALL



The front cover shows a bust of the Emperor Hadrian, from the British Museum; a phalera, that is a Roman centurion's badge of rank, from Corbridge Museum; and a stretch of the Wall near Walltown Crag in Northumberland

HADRIAN'S WALL

An Illustrated Guide

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MINISTRY OF PUBLIC BUILDING & WORKS
LONDON

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

1963

Alan Sorrell made all the reconstruction drawings of landscapes, settlements, and buildings that appear on pages 4, 10, 26-27, 32, 37, 39, 41, 42, 46-47.



View of the Wall from Cuddy's Crag

HADRIAN'S WALL

Scattered across England at its narrowest point, where the Tyne–Solway gap interrupts the Pennine Chain, are to be found a series of Roman remains. These earthworks, stretches of wall, and ruined buildings once formed the frontier of the Roman province of Britain, and at the same time, the northernmost limit of the Roman Empire. ‘Hadrian’s Wall’ is the name by which this frontier is known today, after the emperor who ordered its construction, about the year A.D. 122, although it is also known sometimes simply as the ‘Roman Wall’, and was once known as the ‘Picts’ Wall’, after the people it was supposed to have been built to keep out. There has always been great interest in the Wall. The first Englishman to describe it was the Venerable Bede (A.D. 673–735), although he was wrong about its date and purpose. Until recent times



What Walltown Crags may have looked like 1800 years ago

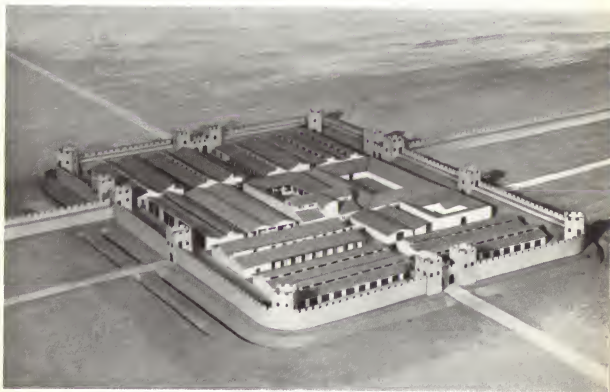
the Wall was much used as a quarry for building material, but most of the surviving remains are now safe in the custody of the Ministry of Public Building and Works.

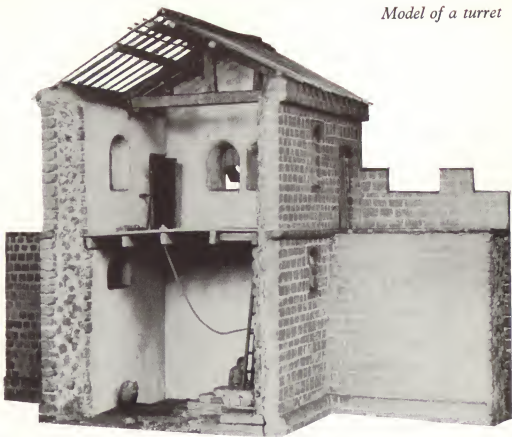
The Wall itself was only one of the elements that formed the Roman frontier line. On the north side of the Wall, except where the ground was very steep, was a great ditch, or 'fosse'. Every mile along it was a small fort called a 'milecastle', and between each pair of milecastles were two turrets. At certain strategic points on or near the Wall were forts for garrisons, ultimately seventeen in number. South of the Wall was a flat-bottomed ditch with an earth rampart on either side, called the 'Vallum'. Between Wall and Vallum a road was later built. Other features which belonged to the scheme were the extension of the milecastles and turrets, though without connecting Wall, down the Cumberland coast – where they are known as 'milefortlets' and 'watchtowers' – and at intervals there were forts here also; the outpost forts north of the Wall; and the Roman port on the Tyne at South Shields.

Measurement, calculation and reports of earlier observers who saw the Wall when more of it was preserved, have given us a good idea of its original dimensions.

The Wall itself was just over 73 miles long (80 Roman miles); and the system of *milefortlets* and *watchtowers* extended down the Cumberland coast for another 40 Roman miles. The original height of the Wall was probably about 15 feet, with a parapet of about 6 feet on top of that. The width of the Wall varies considerably. It was originally designed to be 10 Roman feet wide from Newcastle to the Solway. Only part was completed to this width, though it was extended eastward to Wallsend. Probably for reasons of economy, the rest was built to a narrower gauge of 8 Roman feet, although in some places the broad foundation had already been made and the narrow wall was built on top. Other parts were built to an intermediate gauge of about 9 Roman feet. The places where it is as narrow as 6 feet are usually reconstructions of a later period.

Model of a Roman fort





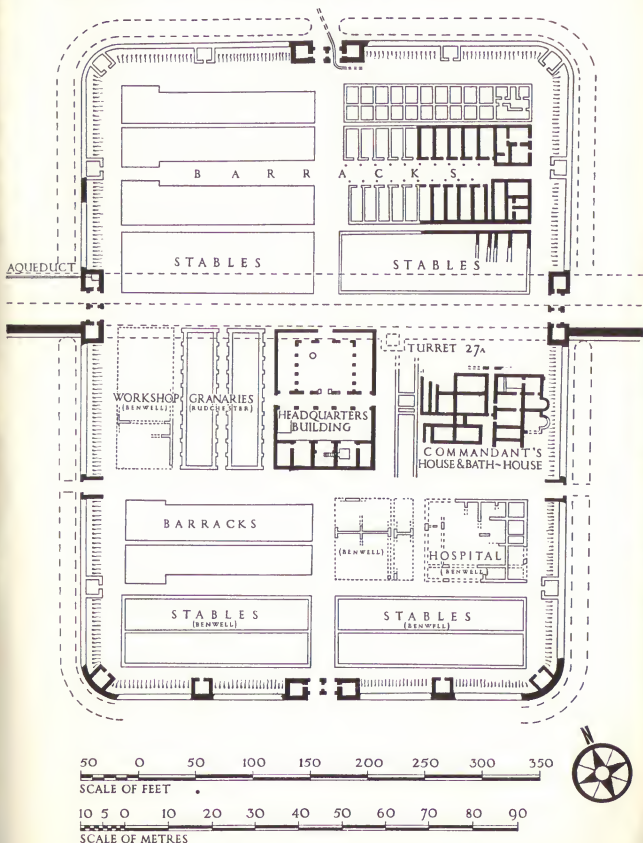
The western end of the Wall from the Irthing to the Solway was at first built of turf, because of the shortage of lime in that area. Mile-castles in this section were built of turf and timber and only the turrets were of stone. Before long this part was reconstructed in stone also, a small section fairly soon, and all of it before A.D. 163.

The ditch on the north side had an average width of 27 feet and an average depth of 9 feet. Between Wall and ditch was an open space – a berm – of mostly about 20 feet, but narrower where the turf wall was replaced in stone.

The milecastles vary in design, probably because of the different legions that built them. Their size varies from 50 to 60 feet in breadth and 65 to 75 feet in length internally. They had gateways at north and south, their south angles were rounded, and their internal accommodation consisted of two small barracks large enough to house about fifty men.

The turrets were towers about 20 feet square recessed into the back of the Wall. They must have had an upper storey on the level of the Wall's parapet reached by an internal ladder. The ditch of *the Vallum* was

PLAN OF CHESTERS FORT





Brunton Turret, from the east

normally 20 feet wide and 10 feet deep, with a flat bottom 8 feet wide. About 30 feet back from the ditch on either side ran a continuous earth mound edged with turf, 20 feet wide at its base and at least 5 feet high.

The Military Way, as the Wall's road is known, was about 20 feet wide.

The forts vary in size and position. Some are built astride the Wall, with three gateways to the north of it. Others have their north wall coterminous with the Wall itself. One or two are quite separate from the Wall. Most were shaped like playing cards, and except that the cavalry forts had stables, were of more or less uniform plan. The size varied with the strength of the unit which formed the garrison, from a little less than two acres at Drumburgh, garrisoned by an infantry battalion 500 strong, to just over $9\frac{1}{4}$ acres at Stanwix, garrisoned by a cavalry regiment 1,000 strong.

The main street (*via praetoria*) led from the main gate (*porta praetoria*) to the headquarters building (*principia*), where it met the other chief thoroughfare of the fort, the *via principalis*, at the end of which were the two side gateways, the *porta principalis dextra* and *porta principalis sinistra*. On one side of the *principia* were the granaries (*horrea*), on the

other side the commanding officer's house (*praetorium*). These formed the central part of the fort, the front and rear portions of which (*praetentura* and *retentura*) were occupied mainly by barracks. The headquarters buildings were of standard plan. At the far end was a range of five administrative rooms, the central one of which was the regimental chapel; then came a cross-hall with a tribunal from which the commanding officer made his announcements; next to the street was a courtyard, at each end of which were storerooms for weapons (*armamentaria*). The gateways had a guard-chamber on either side of the road. At the back of the central block of buildings ran the *via quintana*, parallel to the *via principalis*. At either end of this, in some forts, were two smaller gateways, and it was met at its centre by the *via decumana*, running up from the back gate of the fort. On the inside of the ramparts was a mound of earth and a road, which ran all the way round the fort (the *intervallum* road). Each barrack block housed a company (*centuria*) of about 80 infantry, or two troops (*turmae*) of cavalry, each of one officer and 32 other ranks, with a flat for the officers at one end.



*Fountain-head known
as the Corbridge Lion*



There was a flourishing civil settlement at Housesteads



*The god Taranis – a Celtic
terracotta plaque found
at Corbridge*

History of the Wall

Why was the Wall built? To learn the answer we must briefly examine the history of Roman Britain. The emperor Claudius began the conquest in A.D. 43, and after his short participation in the invasion campaign, returned to Rome, leaving his generals instructions to 'conquer the rest'. But this was never achieved. It was over thirty years before the Romans penetrated Scotland under the famous governor Julius Agricola (A.D. 78–84), who reached the Moray Firth, and even had designs on Ireland. As he advanced northwards, Agricola constructed roads, and forts along them. One line of these was probably between the Forth and the Clyde, and another between the Tyne and the Solway, along the road now called the Stanegate, between Corbridge and Carlisle. By the time Hadrian came to the throne (A.D. 117), most of

Agricola's conquests had been abandoned, and the Romans were back on the Stanegate line. Hadrian had no thought of reconquest. His predecessor Trajan had extended the Empire enormously elsewhere, and Hadrian spent most of his reign (A.D. 117-138) consolidating the gains made, although some of them, including Mesopotamia, had to be abandoned. Several dangerous rebellions broke out in his reign, one of them in Britain.

In A.D. 122, Hadrian visited Britain himself, and appointed as governor his friend Aulus Platorius Nepos. He was to construct a permanent and obvious frontier: a wall 10 feet thick from sea to sea, from Newcastle, where a bridge named after the emperor had been made (*Pons Aelius* after Publius *Aelius* Hadrianus), to the Solway Firth. It would have milecastles every mile and two turrets between, manned by a frontier police, who would prevent smuggling, cattle-raiding and other irregularities. The Romans attached great importance to legal precision, and in Britain, if less than the whole island were occupied, there was no obvious natural frontier, such as the great rivers of Rhine, Danube and Euphrates. So here, as they did wherever there was no such natural



Fragment of the Wall 14 courses high at Hare Hill



Roman milestone on the Stanegate at Chesterholm

frontier, the Romans constructed an artificial one, to demarcate the extent of Roman territory. 'Hadrian constructed the Wall', his biographer explains, 'to separate the Romans from the barbarians'.

During the building of the Wall, policy had to be modified. The Britons to north and south of the line proved more hostile than had been expected. So it was decided to place the regular army units, as well as the frontier police who manned the milecastles and turrets, on the line of the Wall itself, instead of along the Stanegate. The Stanegate forts were replaced by new ones such as Housesteads and Chesters. A little later, it was decided to build the Vallum, to bar entry to the frontier zone to unauthorized persons from the province itself. Meanwhile, on grounds of economy, the Wall was reduced in width; and, to complete the security at the eastern end, it was extended from Newcastle to Wallsend.

It is not certain exactly when the fortlets, watchtowers and forts down the Cumberland coast, and the three outpost forts north of the Wall at its west end, were built, although it was definitely in the reign of Hadrian. Their position, and the fact that the senior officer of the Wall area was the commander of the garrison at Stanwix near Carlisle, show that the area where the Roman frontier forces were expected to be operating was south-west Scotland.



*Roman cavalrymen
carved on a tomb-
stone at Hexham
Abbey*



*Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161) expanded the Empire into Scotland again.
His successful campaign is recorded on the coinage*

Perhaps surprisingly, Hadrian's successor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161) decided to move the frontier forward again. He chose the Forth–Clyde line, where a barrier was built of turf, known as the Antonine Wall. Consequently Hadrian's Wall was for a time almost abandoned, very soon after its construction. The gates were removed from the mile-castle gateways, and gaps were made in the Vallum mounds at 45-yard intervals, the earth thus obtained being used to make causeways across the ditch. Later in the second century, Hadrian's Wall was reoccupied for a time, but it was not until the third century that it became the frontier once more, after the final abandonment of Roman Scotland, because the Antonine Wall was in use a second time from A.D. 184 to 197. The Vallum ditch was redug, and the earth from it was placed along the south lip of the ditch, forming a third mound smaller than the two main ones.

At the end of the second century the Wall was badly damaged. In A.D. 197 the governor of Britain, Clodius Albinus, took away most of the garrison to fight – unsuccessfully – for the throne. The defenceless frontier was overrun by wild tribesmen from the far north, who had at first to be bought off by the new governor sent by the emperor Severus. The latter came over himself in A.D. 208 and undertook extensive campaigns in northern Scotland until his death at York in A.D. 211, when the Romans reverted to the Wall once more. The repair of the damage

caused in A.D. 197 was spread over a period of many years. Among other measures two new outpost forts were garrisoned along Dere Street.

Almost exactly a century later, in A.D. 296, the Wall was overrun in very similar circumstances, when the usurper Allectus took its garrison away to fight the forces of the central government, leaving it open to attack. It was restored shortly afterwards by Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine the Great.

The third destruction of the Wall came in A.D. 367, when Britain was invaded on all sides by different peoples, apparently acting in concert (the 'barbarian conspiracy'), and including Picts, Scots and Saxons. The Wall was restored again, by Count Theodosius, in a somewhat rough and ready fashion and the forts were now made into fortified villages, housing, as well as the soldiers, the civilians who had lived in the settlements outside their walls, which were now abandoned. This is the period described by Rudyard Kipling in *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

With the increase in attacks on Roman Britain from overseas, the original purpose of the Wall, to divide the inhabitants of the island into Romans and barbarians, disappeared. The tribes to the north and the Roman Britons recognized a common danger, and the Wall, no longer necessary, ceased to be occupied at the close of the fourth century.

Constantius Chlorus, who rebuilt the Wall after its second destruction, is greeted by the City of London as he completes the recovery of Britain from the usurper Allectus in A.D. 296





Enamel brooch

*Model of a
legionary*

Cazefields milecastle, no. 42



The Vallum near Sewingshields

Summary of Wall history

A.D. 43	Roman invasion of Britain.
A.D. 71	Roman occupation of the Pennines.
A.D. 78-84	The governor Agricola penetrated to northern Scotland.
Before A.D. 96	Abandonment of much of Scotland.
About A.D. 117	Rebellion in Britain.
A.D. 122-130	Building of the Wall and associated structures.
A.D. 139	Roman reoccupation of southern Scotland. The Antonine Wall between Forth and Clyde built. Only a token force left on Hadrian's Wall.
About A.D. 158-184	Reoccupation of Hadrian's Wall in force. Antonine Wall abandoned.
A.D. 184-197	Antonine Wall reoccupied as well as Hadrian's Wall, but Hadrian's Wall milecastles not occupied.
A.D. 197 End of Wall- period I A.D. 211	Large-scale damage to Wall in the absence of its garrison. Rebuilding by emperor Severus (A.D. 193-211), who also briefly reoccupied Scotland, about A.D. 208-211; but his son Caracalla finally abandoned Scotland in A.D. 211. More outpost forts built north of the Wall.
A.D. 296 End of Wall- period II	Second successful attack on the Wall in the absence of its garrison.
About A.D. 300	Rebuilding of Wall by Constantius Chlorus.
A.D. 367 End of Wall- period III	Third successful attack on the Wall.
A.D. 369	Rebuilding by Count Theodosius. Forts of Wall became fortified villages.
End of fourth century	Wall ceased to be occupied.

ROMAN TOOLS



- a** *entrenching tool*
- b** *pioneer's pickaxe*
- c** *plumb bob*
- d** *pulley block*
- e** *slaters' hammers*

- f** *nails*
- g** *masons' chisels*
- h** *mason's trowel*
- i** *masons' hammers*



Legionaries cutting logs and turves to construct a rampart are portrayed on Trajan's Column in Rome

The Roman Army

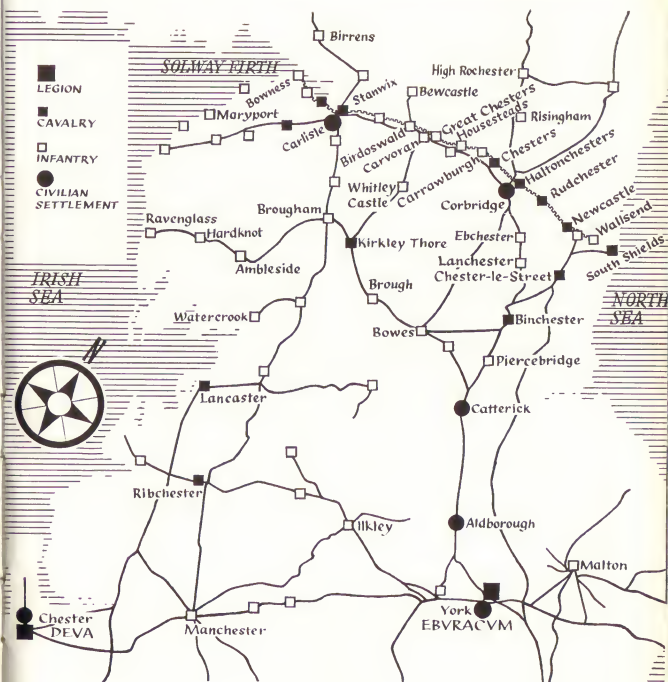
The garrison of Hadrian's Wall was not formed by the Roman legions, but by smaller units of the regular army known as cohorts and *alae*, infantry and cavalry battalions 500 or 1,000 strong. The legions, whose soldiers were always full Roman citizens, were more heavily armed and better paid than the soldiers in other units, who, until citizenship was granted to all free men in A.D. 212, did not receive citizenship till the completion of their 25 years' service. A legion consisted of about 6,000 men. There were three legions in Britain for most of the Roman period, the Second, Sixth and Twentieth. It was these legions whose skilled craftsmen and masons did the actual work of building the Wall, and its forts, after which they returned to their permanent bases at Caerleon, York and Chester, although detachments of legionary craftsmen were

later stationed at the supply-town of Corbridge. The Wall was garrisoned by units originally raised in Spain, Syria, Belgium, Holland, France, Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Morocco – and Britain itself, for local recruitment began at an early stage.

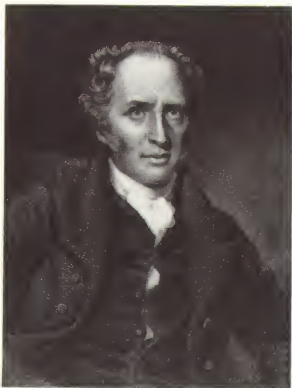
Each legion was commanded by a senator with the title of legate; under him were six tribunes, one of whom was senatorial, and a camp prefect. Each legion had sixty company commanders, the centurions, below whom were a number of non-commissioned officers. The cohorts and *alae* were commanded by prefects or tribunes, under whom were centurions (infantry) and decurions (cavalry).

Severus (A.D. 197–211), or Caracalla (A.D. 211–217), reorganized the administration of Britain, making the northern part a separate province under the commander of the Sixth Legion at York, recognizing, no doubt, in official fashion, what had been earlier practice. The total garrison of the Wall area was about 15,000 men. The units stationed in individual forts were normally engaged in training and exercises comparable to those of any modern army, so as to be able to operate in the field at short notice. Roman strategy did not envisage the defensive. The aim was to forestall enemy action by offensive or preventive





Strategic map of Northern Britain



measures. It is mainly for this reason that the cavalry forts had three gateways north of the Wall, allowing a large number of men to issue forth at the same moment. It has been estimated that a Roman cavalry unit could travel seventy miles in 24 hours. Serious trouble would require reinforcement from the legion at York, from which the arterial road, Dere Street, led straight to the Wall and through it to Scotland.

It is not surprising that the complicated nature of the Wall and Vallum, and the existence of the Stanegate with its forts and the Antonine Wall in Scotland, for centuries confused those who attempted to interpret the Roman frontier in Britain. It is indeed only in the last thirty years that most of the problems of the Wall's history have finally been solved.

The Venerable Bede was convinced that the Wall was built at the end of the Roman period of occupation and that it was designed to keep out the Picts and Scots, whom he portrays as formidable enemies, attacking the unfortunate Britons, and hauling them down from the Wall with long hooks. Bede's idea of the Wall and its purpose has long held the popular imagination.

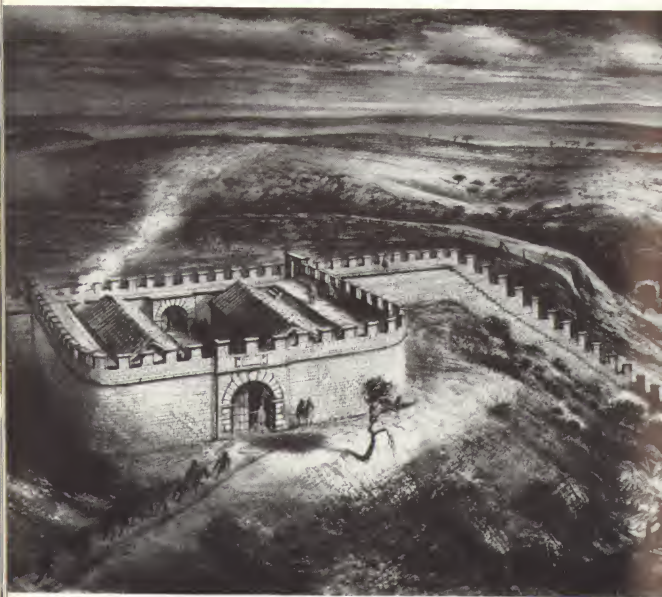
The first man who correctly attributed the whole series of works to



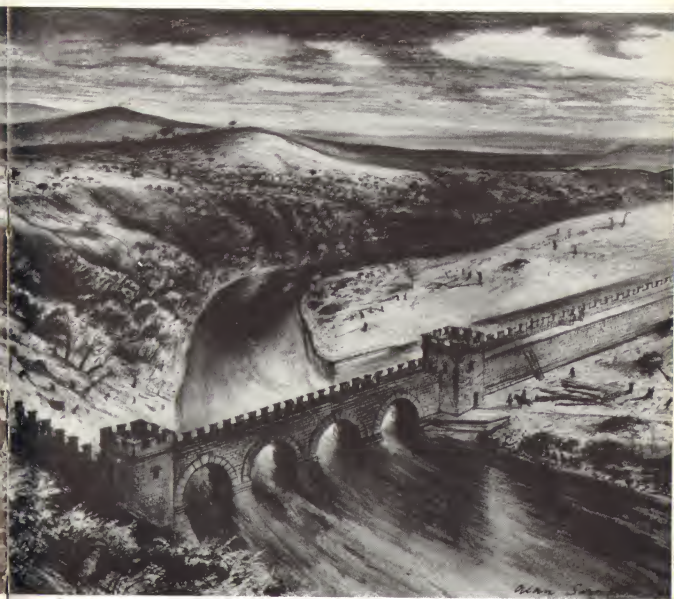
Scholars who devoted themselves to the Wall: the Rev. John Hodgson (left), the Rev. J. Collingwood Bruce (middle), Professor R. G. Collingwood (right)

Hadrian was the Rev. John Hodgson (1779–1845). Earlier antiquaries, historians and visitors such as Camden, Stukeley, Sandy Gordon, Horsley and Hutton had produced far more complicated theories. In the nineteenth century, scientific excavation began, inspired by John Clayton, the owner of Chesters, Housesteads, Chesterholm, and much of the central sector of the Wall. The Rev. J. Collingwood Bruce, who began the series of Wall ‘Pilgrimages’ in 1849, greatly stimulated public interest, and wrote a monograph and handbook about the Wall.

In the last hundred years many excavations have been carried out along the line of the Wall and at other sites, such as Corbridge, intimately connected with it. The most important results of these have been the confirmation by F. G. Simpson of Hodgson’s dating of the Wall’s construction, and the precise dating of the four Wall-periods by the excavations at Birdoswald in 1929. R. G. Collingwood played an important role, by re-examining the purpose of the Wall and by producing a system of numbering Wall sites: the milecastles were numbered 0 to 80 from east to west; the turrets a and b with the number of the milecastle to their east; and the forts I (Wallsend) to XVII (Bowness). Similar numbering has since been added for the Cumberland coast system.



Harrow's Scar milecastle and Willowford Bridge over the Irthing in Roman times



General description of surviving remains

South Shields (Roman name ARBEIA) is the most easterly point along the Roman frontier where remains are visible. From Roman times until the nineteenth century, seagoing vessels kept to the river mouth, so that South Shields was the port for Hadrian's Wall, and was thus, although not strictly part of the Wall line, an integral part of the frontier system which deserves to be included in this account. Parts of the fort have been preserved in Roman Remains Park, Baring Street, at the entrance to which is a museum containing objects found in the fort. Not surprisingly, this supply-base had an exceptionally large number of store-houses.

At *Newcastle upon Tyne* the Museum of Antiquities at King's College is worth a visit. It contains many objects from the Wall and a notable series of model reconstructions, including a scale model of the whole Wall. An unusual feature is the full-size reconstruction of the temple of Mithras at Carrawburgh, with a recorded commentary.

At *Benwell*, just over two miles outside Newcastle on the Carlisle road, was the third Wall fort after Wallsend (SEGEDUNUM) and Newcastle (PONS AELIUS), named CONDERCUM. It was a fort of 5.64 acres with, for most of the Roman period, a cavalry garrison. Excavations were conducted here in the 1920s and 1930s. Nothing of the fort itself may now be seen, but the crossing over the Vallum (at the foot of Denhill Park Avenue) and the temple of the native god Antenociticus (in Broomridge Avenue west of Weidner Road), which both lie outside the fort, have been conserved by the Ministry of Public Building and Works. The Vallum here made a southward diversion to avoid the fort (which proves, incidentally, that the fort was constructed first). The causeway across the Vallum was closed by a massive gateway, with doors opened from the north. This shows how strictly access to the military zone was at first controlled. (It is the only example of such a crossing which may now be inspected). In the third century when the population had become more civilized (all free Roman Britons became full Roman citizens in A.D. 212), the Vallum was disused and largely filled in; and the civil settlement which had grown up for traders and the like, south of the



Vallum, spread right up to the fort walls, as at other forts. It also included married quarters for soldiers, after the emperor Severus had legalized marriage during military service for other ranks. The temple of Antenociticus, a native god whose stone head can be seen in the Museum at Newcastle, was in the civil settlement, as were all religious buildings, except the shrine of the standards in the fort headquarters.

About one mile beyond Benwell, on the main road, can be seen the first piece of Wall, at *Denton Burn*. It is over 9 feet wide, including a turret, no. 7b, 100 yards before the entrance to Denton Hall. A little farther on, a short length of foundation is preserved in the central strip of the Carlisle road.

Between Denton and Heddon, the Vallum and Wall ditch can be seen in places in the fields, and the north gateway threshold of milecastle 10 is at Walbottle Dene House, in the south-east corner of the garden. Just before *Heddon-on-the-Wall*, about 110 yards of the Wall has been preserved on the south side of the road. (The circular construction built into the Wall at the west end of this stretch is of relatively modern date.)

At Heddon begins the so-called Military Road, built after an Act of Parliament had been passed in 1751 to prevent a recurrence of the events of 1745. In that year, the Young Pretender entered England by the western route. The Hanoverian commander, Marshal Wade, was immobilized at Newcastle, as the existing road across to Carlisle was

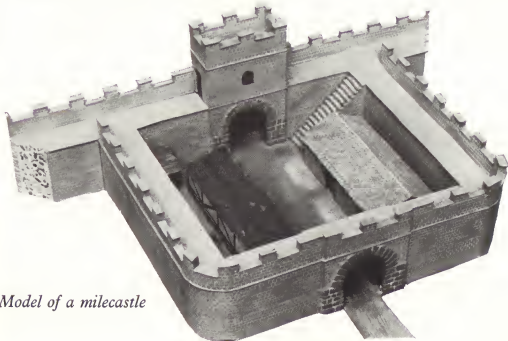
*Woodcut from Bruce's Handbook to the Roman Wall,
showing the Military Road*

incapable of supporting the passage of his artillery. Carlisle and the north-west of England fell to Bonnie Prince Charlie. When it was decided to build a better road, farmers were more willing to sell the land on which the Wall ran than other, more fertile parts, and the stones which remained formed a practical basis for the road. The Wall's remains were therefore ruthlessly levelled for many miles, and the road was built along the top of it. Until the road was tarred, the top of the Wall was visible in the metalling. The Wall was safe from the Hanoverian road-makers only where its line strikes for the rocky heights of the Whin Sill ridge. Between Heddon and Shield-on-the-Wall, a little west of Carrawburgh fort, only a few short stretches have been spared, where the road of 1751 diverges for a while from the line of the Wall. In this sector are the forts of Rudchester (VINDOBALA), Haltonchesters (HUNNUM), Chesters (CILURNUM) and Carrawburgh (BROCOLITIA); and 2½ miles south of Haltonchesters, at Corbridge, is the Roman military town and supply-base of CORSTOPITUM.

After Heddon industrial Tyneside and its outlying development are finally left behind. Although there is no actual Wall to see until Plane-trees, on the east side of the North Tyne valley, the ditches of the Wall on the north side of the Military Way, and the Vallum with its mounds on the south side, are in many places very impressive; and they are an attractive sight in summer in the places where they are thickly overgrown with flowering gorse. The road of 1751, running on top of the Wall, and thus so straight for an English road that many imagine that the road itself is Roman, climbs gradually into a more peaceful and more rural region. To the north lie the moors and hills of Northumberland, to the south the green and fertile valley of the Tyne. At the forts of Rudchester (VINDOBALA) and Haltonchesters (HUNNUM) there are no walls exposed though the keen eye can spot the mounds and ditches where the Roman defences lay. The small medieval stronghold at Halton Castle, a little to the south of Haltonchesters, is a visible reminder of that appreciation by later ages of the work of Roman military masons, which has removed many of the Wall's structures. A little over half a mile west of Haltonchesters is the cross-roads known as Portgate, where Dere Street, the modern A68, crosses the Military Road, on its course to Scotland. This was an important crossing in Roman days. Dere Street, the trunk road built by the governor Agricola forty years before the Wall, continued in use when first Scotland, then the

outpost forts of Risingham and Rochester in Northumberland, had to be supplied along it. Two miles south of Portgate lies *Corbridge*, whose Roman predecessor CORSTOPITUM is situated on a level plateau above the Tyne, a little west of the modern town. The road south crosses Stagshaw Common, where for centuries an annual fair was held, then makes a very steep descent into the Tyne valley, through more thickly wooded and fertile land. Where the modern road diverges to cross the Cor Burn on its way to modern Corbridge, the Roman road runs straight, across fields now, to CORSTOPITUM.

Like the modern Corbridge, Roman CORSTOPITUM was at an important road junction. It lies on the north bank of the Tyne, where Dere Street crosses the river and is met by the Roman road from Carlisle, the Stanegate. Both these roads, and the first fort at Corbridge, were built under Agricola (A.D. 78-84). A series of forts was built here in succession, but almost all the remains at present visible belong to the military town which grew up at the start of the third century. When the Wall was built, CORSTOPITUM fort was at first abandoned, but with the new advance into Scotland, in A.D. 139, it was reoccupied. For a time it remained a normal fort, but under the reorganization of Severus (emperor A.D. 193-211) it lost its earlier garrison and special detachments of legionary craftsmen were stationed here. The place grew into a small town of some 35-40 acres, the central portion of which, some 5-6 acres, is now uncovered and preserved.



Model of a milecastle



The centre of the third-century supply-base at Corstopitum, as it may have appeared to someone approaching from the east, along the Stanegate

The Stanegate itself bisects the centre of the remains. North of it may be seen two large granaries with an underfloor ventilation system; an elaborate fountain; and the foundations of a large storehouse which was never completed. On the south side are two military compounds with very irregular and complicated ground plans. The reason for the irregularity was the need to build round already existing temples. A noticeable feature here is the way in which the walls have subsided in a uniform fashion, producing an undulating surface. This is caused by the presence of an east-west road from the earlier forts, running underneath the walls, causing them to 'break their backs'. Other points of interest are the headquarters building of the west compound which contains a sunken strong room, and a small mullioned window that can be seen at the south end of the granary's east wall.

In the museum can be seen pottery and glass, ornaments, tools, military equipment, inscribed and sculptured stones and other objects found here. Of especial interest is the Corbridge Lion, a sculptured fountain-head.



Model of the Roman bridge over the North Tyne



William Hutton, who at the age of 78 walked the length of the Wall and back

Returning to the line of the Wall and proceeding westwards from Portgate, it will be observed that the Vallum and Wall ditch are particularly well defined. At *Planetrees* is a short stretch of Wall which was saved from destruction in 1801 by the persuasion of William Hutton, the 78-year-old Birmingham antiquary, who in that year walked from Birmingham to Carlisle, along the Wall twice, and back to Birmingham. The wooden cross, on the right-hand side of the road shortly before Planetrees, marks the traditional site of the battle of Heavenfield, where the Christian King of Northumbria, St Oswald, defeated the Welsh invader, Cadwalla, in A.D. 634.

The Military Road now diverges from the Wall for the steep descent to the crossing of the North Tyne. The fine piece of Wall at *Brunton*, with an exceptionally good turret (no. 26b), standing over 7 feet high, must be approached from the Hexham road by a stile, 200 yards south of the cross-roads with the Military Road.

Just before the Military Road crosses the modern bridge, a path leads southwards to the east abutment of the Roman bridge. There is a piece of Wall in the abutment enclosure, 8 feet 8 inches high. The Wall ends here in a tower 22 feet square. The present structure is the result of a Roman rebuilding: a water pier, part of the earlier bridge which carried only the Wall and not a road as well, is embedded in the abutment. There was a mill race in the later bridge: a stone like an axle-tree, with

(*Opposite*)

Objects discovered on the Wall

- a** *The Aesica brooch*
- b** *Statuette of the goddess Victory*
- c** *Statuette of Mercury*
- d** *Bowl of Samian ware*



(Above) The bath-house at Chesters

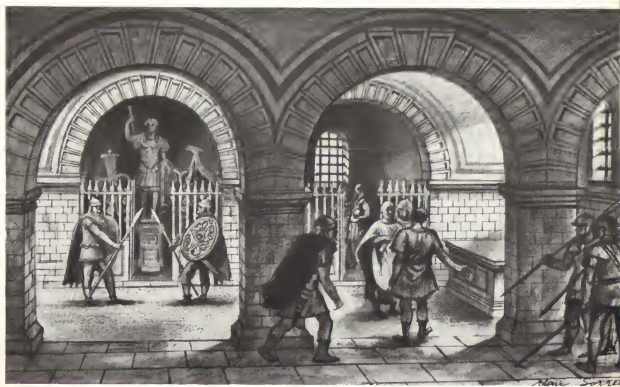
(Below) The reconstructed Mithraeum of Carrawburgh



eight slots for spokes, belonging to the water-wheel, is lying among the ruins. When the river is low, two of the three piers and part of the west abutment are visible.

The fort at *Chesters* (CILURNUM), where a cavalry regiment was stationed, on the west bank of the North Tyne immediately opposite the bridge abutment, is approached today from the north, and the north gateway (*porta praetoria*) is the first of the remains exposed in Chesters park to be reached. Opposite the north gateway is the headquarters building (*principia*) of standard plan, with, as often, an underground strong room below the paymaster's office. East of the *principia* is the commanding officer's house (*praetorium*), which included a bath suite with heated rooms. The Wall joins the fort at the main east gateway: as with many of the forts, the northern third projects beyond the Wall. All the fort gateways are exposed and also the angle and interval towers of the southern rampart.

Between the fort and the river are the fort baths, a large building set into the sloping river bank, containing a complex series of rooms, where baths of varying heat could be taken, changing-room, cold douche, and



Activity in the principia, or headquarters building, at Chesters



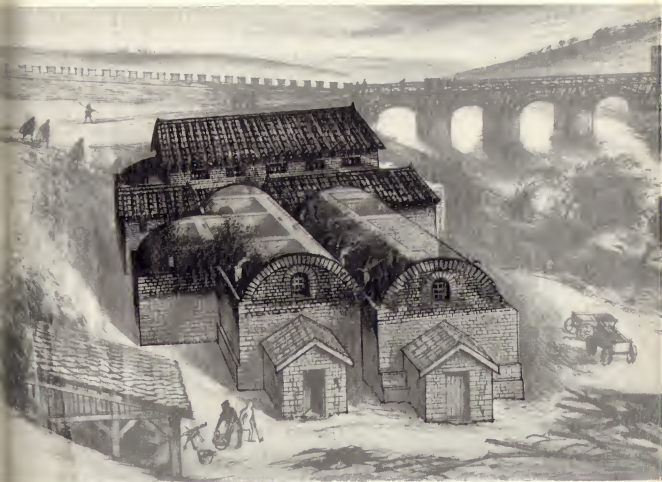
Martingales in Housesteads Museum; they were fastened to the reins to prevent a horse from rearing or throwing back its head

the other elements of the traditional Roman system, very similar to the Turkish bath.

Lovers of wild flowers may notice some comparatively rare specimens growing among the ruins, such as yellow fumitory (*corydalis lutea*), shining-leaved crane's bill (*geranium lucidum*), and the rockplant (*erinus alpinus*), known as the 'Roman Wall plant', which is not in fact a survival from Roman times, but was planted here by a Vicar of Stamfordham anxious to bolster the legend of a plant having been brought here by the Romans.

In the church of *Chollerton*, about a mile and a half above the modern bridge, are monolithic columns used in the south side of the main aisle, and an altar to Jupiter Best and Greatest used as a font. These Roman stones were probably taken from the fort. There is an interesting small museum at Chesters, in which are inscribed and sculptured stones, pottery, glass and small objects from Chesters and other Roman forts in the district.

The first piece of Wall which can be seen west of Chesters is just under two miles from the entrance to the fort, at *Black Carts*, on the north side of the road. It is a fine stretch, including a turret (no. 29a) much of which is 6 feet high, but is very much overgrown by trees. The



The bath-house in detail

- A porch
- B changing-room
- C lobby
- D ante-room
- E hot dry room
- F latrine
- G cold room
- H early cold bath
- I first warm room
- J unctorium (where bathers were rubbed with oil)
- K hot room
- L second warm room
- M hot bath



Martingales in Housesteads Museum; the cross-shaped pieces prevent a horse from rearing or throwing a leg.

the other elements of the toilet system, very similar to the Turkish bath.

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*Near Walltown
Crag*

Vallum ditch, on the other side of the road, is also fine here, cut through the rock, and the gaps in the mounds at 45-yard intervals are very clear. At *Limestone Corner*, at the top of the hill, there is a wide view of the North Tyne valley, and the Simonside and Cheviot Hills to the north. The ditches of both Vallum and Wall have at this point been cut through the quartz dolerite bedrock. The Vallum ditch was completely excavated but the Wall ditch, less essential, was left unfinished, with several massive partly cut blocks lying at its bottom, in some of which the luis-holes for lifting the stone can be seen.

Soon after Limestone Corner, the Wall makes for the heights of the *Whin Sill*, an impressive ridge of quartz dolerite 1,230 feet high at its highest point, and runs for many miles along this characteristic heaving skyline. Here begins the central sector of the Wall, where the remains are in their best state of preservation, in the finest countryside of the Wall area, the 'Wall country' *par excellence*. For miles to the north extend lonely moors, the haunt of the curlew and the peewit. The heather, bracken and rough tufted grass, with the three tiny lakes known locally as loughs (pronounced 'luffs') in the foreground, and the hills of south Scotland and north Northumberland in the far distance,

make an impressive view from the top of the Wall. Local tradition used to place many of the exploits of King Arthur and his knights in this region. Certainly, in the Middle Ages the country was wild and lawless, the home of cattle-raiders and moss troopers, whose activities extended far across the Scottish border and deep into the south of England. The Elizabethan antiquary Camden was unable to visit this part when examining the remains of the Wall, for fear of the 'Border robbers'.

Almost a mile west of Limestone Corner is *Carrawburgh*. Only the grass-covered ramparts of the Roman fort of BROCOLITIA are at present visible, but to the south of the fort, the temple of Mithras has been excavated and conserved. There were many temples of Mithras in Roman frontier areas, as the god appealed especially to soldiers. This temple was violently destroyed in the fourth century, possibly by Christians, who feared Mithraism as a religion which, in some of its rituals and beliefs, resembled Christianity itself.

Another mile and a half to the west comes milecastle 33, *Shield-on-the-Wall*, beyond which the Military Road at last abandons the line of the Wall. The Vallum and Wall now become widely separated. The



A Mithraic ceremony in progress. The figures with raven and lion head-dress wear the uniform of their grade in the hierarchy



Housesteads: (above) as it might have looked; (below) from the air today

Wall makes for the heights while the Vallum has been dug along an easier course. To follow the Wall along its line it is now necessary to leave the road and make for the fields and crags.

The next farm along the Wall's course, *Sewingshields*, is one of many places in the Wall country associated with legends of King Arthur. Here once stood a castle mentioned by Scott in his poem *Harold the Dauntless*. The tradition was that the King and his court lay in enchanted sleep in a cave or hall below the castle, till someone should find them, blow a bugle and cut a garter with the 'sword of the stone'. A farmer of Sewingshields is said to have found the place and cut the garter, forgetting to blow the bugle first. Arthur and his knights rose from their sleep, but the spell was not sufficiently broken and they sank back to rest once more.

Just west of the farm plantation are the remains of milecastle 35. From the top of the next rise, Broomlee Lough, where a box of treasure is said to be sunk, can be seen to the north. From the foot of the crags the mysterious earthwork called the Black Dyke runs northwards across



*Hadrian, who ruled the
Empire A.D. 117-138*



Ditch cut through basalt at Limestone Corner

the moors. It has been traced from Moralee on the South Tyne to Tarsset on the North Tyne, and was probably a Dark Ages boundary mark.

At King's Hill is the next milecastle, no. 36, a little west of which comes the first view of Housesteads fort. In the little valley below the fort is a gateway through the Wall, which had two sets of doors, allowing frontier guards to lock travellers or traders in, while they examined them and their baggage.

Housesteads (Roman name uncertain, possibly *VERCOVICIUM*, although widely known by the incorrect name of *BORCOVICUS* or *BORCOVICIUM*) is the most exciting of the Wall forts. Its ramparts and gateways are all well preserved. The granaries, headquarters building, latrines, barracks and some civil settlement buildings outside the fort are also uncovered. The fort is built on the bedrock, on the edge of the Whin Sill, and its long axis is east to west to make the best possible use of the restricted space available.

As one looks towards Housesteads from the Military Road, especially on a grey, misty day, when the grim outlines of the fort can only just be made out, and, below the fort, the terraced slopes where in later days the soldiers attempted to grow crops to support themselves, it is easy to imagine that many an infantryman of the First Cohort of Tungrians

would curse the day he enlisted, not to speak of the prefect, who would be a man of wealth and station, doing a few years' tour of duty to gain honour or advancement. Yet soon recruitment became local, and no doubt recruits who enlisted from Pennine farmsteads loved the countryside they were born in, as much as Northumbrians today are attached to their native heath. Not every visitor to the Wall will be as enthusiastic and energetic as old William Hutton, but many have caught 'Wall fever' in varying degree. Kipling's picture of the dedicated centurion Parnesius in *Puck of Pook's Hill* may not be so wide of the mark, even if romance, not history. The wild and lovely countryside, and the knowledge that they were at the northernmost frontier of the civilized world, must have made a lasting impression on the soldiers' minds, whether native Britons, Italians, Gauls, Spaniards, Africans, Syrians, Illyrians or Germans. But life at Housesteads had its seamy side as well, as the visitor who looks at the 'Murder House', one of the civil settlement buildings outside the fort, can picture. Here were excavated bones which had clearly been deliberately buried for concealment under the floor of the shop or tavern. They were the remains of a man and a woman, of the early fourth century – and embedded in the man's ribs was the point of a sword.

The south gateway tower of the fort was used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a stronghold by the Armstrongs, a notorious gang of cattle-raiders and moss troopers. In the small museum near the fort are maps, plans and models, and some of the inscribed and sculptured stones, pottery, coins and other objects found at Housesteads or Chesterholm.

The Wall proceeds west from Housesteads on top of precipitous cliffs, which make a ditch unnecessary. In a few hundred yards Housesteads milecastle (no. 37) is reached, one of the best preserved, with massive north gateway and part of the barrack accommodation, uncovered in excavations in 1933.

In about one mile Crag Lough is reached. A mile due south of this tiny lake is the fort of *Chesterholm* (VINDOLANDA), one of the forts along the Stanegate, on a little plateau on the west side of the Chainley Burn. Originally built in the first century A.D., and abandoned when the Wall was built, it was reoccupied and counted as one of the Wall forts later in the second century. Some of the ramparts, gateways and central buildings are conserved. Where the Stanegate crosses the burn stands a



The fort at Birdoswald would have commanded the gorge of the Irthing

Roman milestone in its original position. About a mile due west (but not in fact exactly one Roman mile) is the base of another Roman milestone; and this mile of the Stanegate is a particularly good example of a stretch of Roman road. VINDOLANDA is distinguished as the home, or at least the place of burial, of one of the rare recorded Christians of Roman Britain, a man with the Celtic name Brigomaglos, whose tombstone was found here.

Back on the line of the Wall, a steep, undulating course is followed, passing milecastles 38 and 39, up to *Winshields*, milecastle 40, just short of the highest point of the whole Wall (1,230 feet above sea-level).

From here, on a clear day, the hills of south-west Scotland are visible, and a little to their right the isolated flat-topped hill of Burnswark, crowned by a native hill fort. This was besieged by the Romans,



the traces of whose siege-camps surrounding the hill still remain; near the hill was placed the fort of Birrens, one of the outposts of the Wall. To the south Skiddaw, Saddleback and Cross Fell can sometimes be made out. In the Pennines to the south lived the Brigantians, the largest tribe in Britain, whose lawless hillmen were as much a threat to the security of the province as their cousins outside it. A portion of the Brigantians clearly lived in the Birrens area beyond the Wall. Was this one reason why Antoninus Pius attempted to incorporate Scotland in the empire once more – to put an end to a ‘Free Brigantian’ movement? North Northumberland was friendly, the home of the Votadini, who appear at the end of Roman Britain as the Gododdin of the Welsh lay, who rescued their Celtic kinsmen of North Wales from the menace of the sea-raiders.

From Winshields the Wall follows the rise and fall of the Whin Sill to *Cawfields*, where there is another well-preserved milecastle, no. 42. A little south of the Wall here is the Stanegate and the clear outlines of a small fort at Haltwhistle Burn. The Wall has been removed here by quarrying for a short stretch, and thereafter is not well preserved. At *Greatchesters* a short way farther west was the fort of AESICA, where the ramparts, two gateways, an angle tower, some barracks and an underground strong room with vaulted roof may be seen, all rather overgrown and in a poor state of conservation. In one of the guard-chambers of the south gateway was discovered the Aesica brooch, one of the finest examples of Romano-Celtic art.

The Wall can now be followed for another three miles along the Nine Nicks of Thirlwall, where the characteristic undulating profile of the Whin Sill is particularly pronounced, with steep descents at the 'nicks'. For most of the stretch the Wall is in a somewhat tumbledown state, but at *Walltown* is a particularly well-preserved section recently consolidated by the Ministry, which includes an unusual turret (no. 45a), possibly built before the Wall, as a signal tower.

A little east of Walltown is the site of *Carvoran* fort (probably the Roman BANNA). Here was stationed one of the few Roman units of archers – this one was from Syria. This fort is not accessible to the visitor. Virtually no remains of it are visible.

The next piece of Wall after Walltown is a very short fragment in the verge of the modern road between Greenhead and Gilsland, at Longhope. In the garden of the former vicarage at *Gilsland* is an interesting length of broad Wall foundation with narrow Wall on top of it.

The Wall, as it leaves Gilsland on its way to the River Irthing, has been conserved by the Ministry. Two turrets (48a and 48b) may be seen in the stretch leading to the east abutment of the Roman bridge across the Irthing. As with the bridge abutment at Chesters, the visible remains incorporate the work of more than one building period. The remains of a tower, abutment and pier may be seen.

The river has changed its course considerably since Roman days, making the bank opposite the abutment much steeper. But the river can generally be forded and the bank climbed, by the more energetic. At the top of the cliff on the west side is milecastle 49, from which a particularly fine stretch of Wall runs to Birdoswald fort.

Birdoswald (CAMBOGLANNA) has a fine situation above the Irthing

gorge. A nineteenth-century Earl of Carlisle thought that the view across the valley from the fort was the finest in Cumberland, and compared it with the view at Troy. The walls and gateways of the fort are under the custody of the Ministry. The north-west angle tower with wall fourteen courses high is especially well preserved, as is also the main east gateway. CAMBOGLANNA is thought by some to be Camlen, where King Arthur fought his last battle.

Some miles north of Birdoswald is the fort of *Bewcastle*, one of the Wall's outposts. The remains of the castle, and the church, outside which is the famous Saxon cross, occupy part of the area of this fort, the Roman road to which crosses Spadeadam Waste, where there is now the rocket-testing range.

Half a mile south, in the little church of *Over Denton*, the chancel arch is made of Roman stones. As it does not fit the pillars on which it rests, it is probable that the Norman church builders re-erected an arch from the fort at Birdoswald.

At the crossing of the Irthing the scene changes. The country westward from here to the Solway is gentler and less rugged. The reason is



Three cloaked deities, preserved in Housesteads Museum

geological. The limestone belt ends, and the red sandstone of the Irthing and Eden valleys begins – the very reason why the Romans at first built the Wall of turf west of the Irthing being the absence of good limestone to make the core of the Wall and the mortar to bind the masonry. This same geological feature has caused posterity to deal unkindly with the Wall in Cumberland, where its valuable properties as building material were long appreciated more highly than its historical interest.

Just west of Birdoswald fort, remains of the Wall have been conserved, including turret 49b. In the second field west of Birdoswald portions of the original turf Wall are visible.

About two miles west of Birdoswald is turret 51b. A little farther on at *Pike Hill* is an unusual signalling tower, set at 45° to the Wall, and clearly built before it, but later incorporated into the Wall's structure. Two hundred yards west is turret 52a, standing fourteen courses high, with a stretch of Wall on either side. Less than a mile west is the highest piece of Wall now remaining, a short length only 15 feet long, at *Hare Hill* on the west side of Banks Burn. Its height is 9 feet 10 inches. But the facing stones are nineteenth-century restoration, although the core of the Wall is original Roman work. One more small piece of Wall is still visible just east of *Walton* village. Thereafter, although the Wall ditch and Vallum earthworks are often clearly to be seen, no more Wall remains exposed. Its line carries on west to the Solway, passing the sites of five more Wall forts – Castlesteads, Stanwix, Burgh, Drumburgh and Bowness – and the Roman town of Carlisle, once a place of some seventy acres in extent. At none of these places are remains now exposed. At Tullie House, Carlisle, there is a fine museum containing Roman antiquities, and those who wish to visit the westernmost end of the Roman frontier will find the view across the Solway rewarding. From Bowness began the system of milefortlets, watchtowers and forts which extended the frontier defences another forty miles down the Cumberland coast. It was possibly from one of the places down this coast that the young Roman Briton Patricius was kidnapped by pirates from Ireland in the last days of Roman Britain, to be known to posterity as the apostle of Ireland, St Patrick. On the far side of the Solway are the hills of Galloway and the Stewartry, the home of dissident tribesmen and the chief potential disturbers of 'the boundless majesty of the Roman peace'.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Ministry of Public Building and Works gratefully acknowledges help given by the following persons and institutions in choosing and collecting illustrations:—

Dr D. J. Smith, Keeper of the Museum of Antiquities of the University of Durham and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, advised on the selection of museum objects and made available a transparency of the reconstructed Mithraeum photographed by Dr R. Raper (page 36). The models of the fort (page 5), turret (page 6), and milecastle (page 31) are in the museum at King's College, Newcastle.

In Corbridge Museum are the badge portrayed on the front cover; the Corbridge Lion (page 9); the enamel brooch (page 17); the dice boxes and dice (page 22); the model of the North Tyne bridge (page 33); and all the objects reproduced in colour on page 35.

Dr J. P. C. Kent, of the Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum, advised on the selection of coins and made available the photographs on pages 15 and 16.

The bust of the Emperor Hadrian illustrated on the front cover and on page 43 is also in the British Museum.

Professor Eric Birley made available photographs of the portraits of antiquarians on page 24 and of the woodcut on page 29.

The picture of Professor Collingwood on page 25 was supplied by the National Portrait Gallery from a photograph by Walter Stoneman.

The portrait of William Hutton on page 34 was supplied by Birmingham Library.

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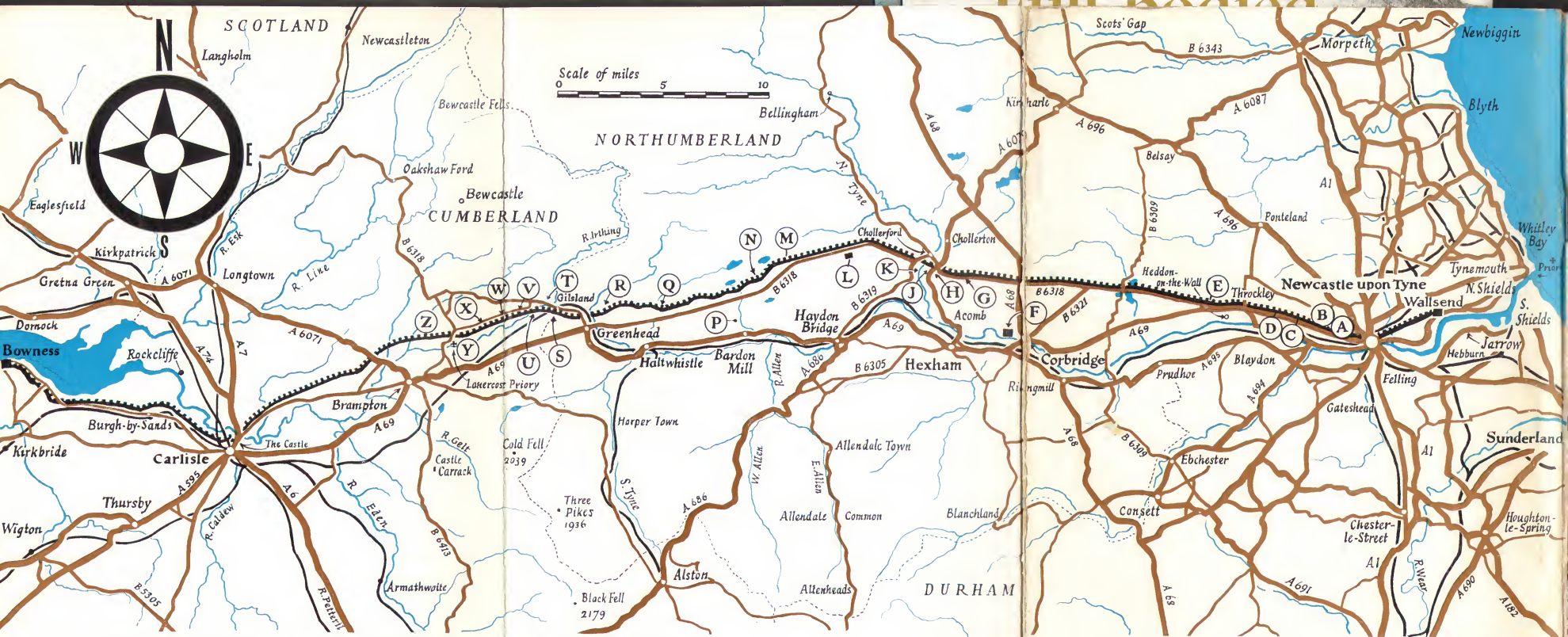
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A Map showing the Wall from Wallsend-on-Tyne to Bowness-on-Solway